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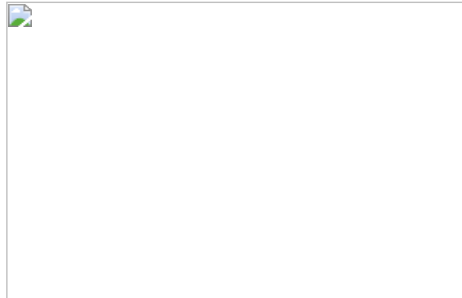


What is Stregoneria vs Stregheria

by Paolo Giordano

(translation by Georgina Frosini)

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What are the differences between stregoneria and stregheria, and what exactly is stregoneria? Stregoneria is the modern word in Italian that is commonly translated into English as the word witch. In the Italian dictionary – Vocabolario della Lingua (Nicola Zanichelli, 1970) - stregoneria is defined as a magical practice intended to produce harm or illness. Stregheria is referenced in this book as a rare usage, and it is also defined as witchcraft. In this article the differences between the two words, and

what they actually mean, will be revealed.

The statement that stregoneria refers to a harmful magical practice is supported by ethnologist Elsa Guggino, who states that words related to stregoneria are always used disparagingly to describe someone practicing malevolent magic (Stregoneria: The "Old Religion" in Italy from Historical to Modern Times, by Marguerite Rigoglioso, 2000).

Stregoneria, from a historical perspective, is a form of sorcery found in pre-Christian times. With the establishment of the Catholic Church, stregoneria was opposed and eventually outlawed. It appears to have survived in fragmented forms well into the 17th century. As scholar Ruth Martin points out, all practices such as sortilegio, erbaria, and fattucheria were regarded as stregoneria. This is discussed in her book titled Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice 1550 – 1650.

Martin also notes the last remaining vestiges of "non-Christian" elements in stregoneria, which appear in the 16th century trial of Elena Draga (also known as Elena Crusichi). Such elements demonstrate the former pagan roots of stregoneria. However, with each passing century the authentic forms of stregoneria withered and passed away. It was displaced with Christian traditions mixed with folk magic beliefs, which bear little if any resemblance to the authentic forms of stregoneria that once existed in Italy. This is very often the fate of inner traditions once they fall into the hands of the general population.

Some modern practitioners of Italian folk magic traditions now claim to be witches. However, professor Sabina Magliocco points out that the folk magic practitioners of Italy view themselves as Catholic; therefore to refer to them as "witches" is an act of cultural violence against Italian folk traditions and their practitioners (Spells, Saints, and Streghe: Witchcraft, Folk Magic, and Healing in Italy – published in Pomegranate, August 2000). Many Italian witches are offended that some people equate witchcraft with the Catholic folk traditions of the non-initiate population of Italy. Therefore this position is offensive to both the authentic folk practitioners of Italy and the authentic witches of Italy.

Stregoneria contrasts sharply with the tradition of Stregheria. The former is now a quasi-Catholic oriented sorcery found in common Italian folk traditions, and the latter is a pagan oriented religious system with a magical structure for rituals and spells. The word "stregheria" is an archaic word for witchcraft that is now applied in place of the word "stregoneria." Those wishing to differentiate themselves from Christian stregoneria, (which usurped and distorted the pre-existing tradition of witchcraft) now use the term stregheria. The use of the word stregheria is now reclaimed by those who are not ashamed or fearful of their Italian pagan roots.

One old example of the usage of "stregheria" appears in the book Apologia della Congresso Notturmo Delle Lamie, by Girolamo Tartarotti (1751), which almost exclusively uses the word stregheria in place of stregoneria. Due to modifications over the centuries, the terms stregoneria and stregheria must now be viewed as referring to different systems. In fact, a dictionary printed in

the year 1900 (Nouveau dictionnaire italien-français et français-italien – by Costanzo Ferrari) provides separate entries for *stregoneria* and *stregheria*. The entry for *stregoneria* refers strictly to sorcery, while the entry for *stregheria* refers to organized witchcraft in connection with the Sabbat. The connection of the word *stregheria* to the Sabbat is particularly noteworthy. Tartarotti includes a discussion of the veneration of the goddess Diana in connection with *Stregheria*, which further demonstrates the difference between it and *stregoneria*. Such a connection can be found in pre-Christian writings like those of Horace (the *Epodes*).

SIGNS THAT A TRADITION IS NOT AUTHENTIC ITALIAN WITCHCRAFT

Over the past decade we have seen the rise of groups and individuals claiming to be witches, but are actually only practicing common folk magic and folk healing traditions that bear a slight resemblance to some elements of authentic Italian witchcraft. In Italy the majority of groups (along with websites) have merged eclectic material together, erroneously portraying this as Italian witchcraft. In reality it is a mixture of ancient Egyptian Isis worship, hermetics, Greco-Roman religion, and Catholic-based folk traditions. Authentic Italian witchcraft in Italy is still an underground society and continues to remain in the shadows.

Some modern groups and individuals claiming to practice witchcraft have rejected any pagan elements in favor of the Catholic-rooted traditions of Italy. Although seen in Italy to a small degree, this phenomenon is largely found among segments of the Italian-American population seeking their European roots. Their rejection of the authentic forms of Italian witchcraft in favor of Catholic-rooted folk traditions is a symptom of fearing to relinquish Christianity. In other words they want to be witches but are apparently afraid to be pagan for fear of damnation (a Judeo-Christian belief). Therefore they have invented a “Christian witchcraft” system, which they feel is a safeguard against offending “God”. The following are nine primary signs of this fake type of witchcraft:

1. The inclusion of Christian symbols, the rosary, holy water, communion wafers, saints, Jesus, and Church holidays.
2. The passing on of “the power” on Christmas Eve (typically related to healing).
3. Claiming that common folklore and folk traditions are witchcraft traditions.
4. Claiming that folk healers and folk magic users are witches.
5. Ignorance of the *cimaruta* as the witches’ symbol, and viewing it as a folk charm for protection or good fortune.
6. Ignorance of inner traditions related to Befana, the witch gift-giver figure. In fake witchcraft traditions Befana is linked to the birth of Jesus and the appearance of the Magi.
7. Denial of surviving elements of paganism, and denial of pagan roots of origin.
8. Reliance upon information found in published books on Italian folk traditions, customs, and folk magic (with no access to initiate level material). From this is constructed a fabricated Christian witchcraft system incorporating Italian folk traditions in an attempt to appear authentic.
9. A belief that common Italian family practices involving saint magic & blessings, techniques against the “evil eye” and the use of common items such as scissors, needles, red thread, salt, and other household items is a form of authentic witchcraft.

One of the problems with Christianized *stregoneria* is its fostering of superstitions, which are indicative of ignorance and lack of education. Those who promote Christianized *stregoneria* contribute to the negative stereotypes of Italians as ignorant and backwards. This undermines the efforts of others who wish to demonstrate higher levels of spirituality within Italian systems and traditions. As previously noted, claiming that folk magic and folk healing in an Italian folk tradition is witchcraft also offends authentic Italian folk practitioners. The harm this is doing to the Italian witchcraft community, the community of Italian folk traditions, and to sincere seekers of information, is yet to be fully realized.